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ABSTRACT

To help agencies serve the needs of older black men, this paper presents an overview of the physical, social, and economic status of older rural black men. The report is based on a study of a sample of 62 black men, aged 65 to 97, who constituted a subset of older adults from a larger study of the kin network system of 368 adults over 65 living in a rural county in the southern United States. Subjects were interviewed in their homes. The mean age of the subjects was approximately 73 years, and they had an average educational level of five years. Monthly income ranged from $166 to $2100 with a mean of $492, and the subjects had lower mean annual incomes than those reported for older blacks in the United States in general. The impact of their low income was evident in their expressed needs for services important to income, e.g., senior citizen discounts, meal services, and health maintenance and monitoring. As a group, older black men seldom appeared to be limited by a number of reported chronic health conditions, but one third seldom left their residence, suggesting the need for increased decentralized or home delivery services. The group showed considerable stability in their housing arrangements, but mortgages and household expenses posed frequent problems. The majority were heads of households, and they perceived themselves as contributing to the family network. Compared to other groups of elderly, the impact of perceived adequacy of income on morale was considerably more important to older black men. Three statistical tables are included. (KH)

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Older Rural Black Men:

Their Life Situation and Subjective Well-Being[1]

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(Expanded Summary)

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Older Rural Black Men:

Their Life Situation and Subjective Well-Being

Many negative stereotypes and myths surround black males in our society (Gary, 1981; Martin & Martin, 1978; Wilkinson & Taylor, 1977), however, their situation in later life is largely obscure. As a result of the unique characteristics that black men bring to old age, it has been suggested that many agencies fail to understand and to meet their special needs. The overall purposes of this study were (1) to provide a general overview of the physical, social, and economic status of older rural black men, and (2) to determine the similarity of factors influencing their subjective well-being to those for other older adult sex/race cohorts.

Methodology

Sample and Measures

The sample of this study consisted of 61 black men aged 65 to 97 years who constituted a subset of older adults from a larger study of the kin network system of 368 older adults 65 years or older living in a rural county in the southern United States. The sample was selected using an area cluster sampling strategy and the sample was stratified on race. Subjects were interviewed in their homes. Variables examined for the present study included: Self-rated health, ability to "get around", days sick and unable to carry on usual activities, number of days hospitalized during the year, most important roles, household head status, type of housing, housing companions, length of residence, number

of times moved during the past five years, morale, marital status, annual income, perceived adequacy of income, social activity, and service use and need.

Statistical Analyses

The first research question which addressed the general status of the subjects was analyzed using percentages and means. The second question which asked, "What is the similarity of factors influencing the subjective well-being of older black men and other sex/race cohorts?", was addressed through the use of step-wise multiple regression. Four regression models were constructed for purposes of the comparison: Black males, black females, white males, and white females. The dependent measure, morale, was regressed upon social activity, marital status, health, and perceived adequacy of income. Additionally, a one-way analysis of variance was used to determine if there were differences in the morale of the four subgroups.

Findings and Discussion

The mean age of the older black subjects was approximately 73 years (SD = 6.26) and they had an average educational level of 5 years (SD = 3.42). The majority of the men, 75%, had been either laborers, farmers or farm laborers. The remainder had been dispersed over professional, clerical, managerial, and crafts type jobs.

Monthly income for the subjects ranged from $166 to $2100 with a mean of $492. When asked the adequacy of their income, older black subjects (43%) usually said that they never had enough money. The

economic profile of older rural black men showed them to have considerably lower mean annual incomes than those reported for older blacks in general in the United States ($5,912 vs $9,618) (Jackson, 1985). This observation suggested the jeopardizing effect of rural residence, and perhaps, region on race. Older black men, although reporting considerably lower incomes than corresponding white men, reported incomes similar to those of older white women and greater than those of older black women (Table 1). The impact of low income among the black men subjects was evident through their expressions of the inadequacy of their income and the extent to which they expressed a need for services important to income, e.g., senior citizen discounts, meal services, and health maintenance and monitoring (Table 2).

As a group, older black men seldom appeared to be limited by a number of reported health conditions which were generally chronic in nature. Approximately one in three, however, seldom left their residence, suggesting the need for increased decentralized or home delivered services. This observation appeared to be supported in the proportional numbers of subjects wanting home delivered meals, transportation, outreach, health screening, and homemaker aid services (Table 2).

Older black men showed considerable stability in their housing arrangements given the few numbers who had moved during the past five years and the length of time in their present residence. There appeared to be a high premium attached to home ownership as evidenced through the numbers of men who were either purchasing their home or owned their

residence. The large number of mortgages and the relatively frequent mention of household expenses as a financial problem suggested the impact of housing costs on the subjects. These observations were also supported by the large percentage of black subjects who would like to have a home repair service available to them. The data suggested that older black men were involved in a number of roles, the most important of which were family related. The majority, for example, were heads of household, and they perceived their three most important roles in life to be family related. Included here were the roles of husband, father, and uncle/ grandfather. The worker role was still assumed by about 16% of the men. Although role performance was not measured, these data suggest that older black men perceived themselves as contributing to the family network.

Data from this study show that although the factors that impacted the morale of older black men were similar to those influencing that of other groups of elderly, the impact of these factors differed (Table 3). Perceived adequacy of income, a major factor in the morale of most sex/race cohorts examined, was considerably more important to the morale of black men. [$\underline{R}^2$ = .43 vs $\underline{R}^2$ = .27 (black women), $\underline{R}^2$ = .14 (white men), and $\underline{R}^2$ = .15 (white women)].

In conclusion, life situation as observed through the morale of older black men could be interpreted as good and similar to that of other rural elderly. This finding may be related to the leveling effect of age and rural residence on race and sex. Results of the study illustrate the similarity of factors impacting the subjective well-being

across various groups of the rural elderly, yet their differential effects. For example, the data show the overriding importance of perceived adequacy of income to the subjective well-being of older black males as compared to other elderly adults. This finding along with the expressed service needs of older black men suggest that they may represent a special group in terms of their service needs in order to maintain their moderately high levels of physical mobility, subjective well-being, and their life roles.

Table 1

Selected Physical, Social, and Psychological Characteristics of Older Black Men as Compared to Black Women, White Women, and White Men

Variables	Older black males (n = 61)	Older black females (n = 104)	Older white males (n = 66)	Older white females (n = 125)
	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$	$\bar{X}$
Enough money[1]	2.95	2.89	2.20	2.22
Self-rated health	5.75	6.12	5.38	6.04
Activity[2]	.75	.68	.71	.79
Morale	28.26	28.40	27.89	28.15
Income	492.69	410.00	651.09	483.17
Education	5.39	6.56	7.56	8.18
Age	73.23	73.97	74.64	75.46

[1]Scale of 1-5 ranging from always enough money to never enough.

[2]Number of social groups, clubs, church with which involved.

Table 2

Services Used and Not Used but Wanted as Reported by Older Black Men

Services	Services used %	Service - not used but wanted %
Respite	1.7	24.6
Health screening	16.7	50.8
Personal counseling	3.3	16.4
Tax counseling	3.3	8.2
Telephone reassurance	1.7	10.0
Information and referral	8.3	23.0
Senior citizen discount	36.7	78.9
Transportation	15.0	44.8
Homemaker aids	--	27.1
Home repair	--	44.3
Exercise program	1.7	3.3
Outreach	1.7	34.4
Home delivered meals	3.4	33.9
Congregate meals	13.6	48.3
Legal services	--	23.3

Note. N = 61.

Table 3

The Relative Importance of Physical and Social Factors to the Morale of Older Rural Adults According to Race and Gender

Independent variables	Older black males (n = 61)	Older black females (n = 104)	Older white males (n = 66)	Older white females (n = 125)
Marital status	.36	.59	1.39	
Enough money	-1.50***	-.84	-1.06*	-.98*
Self-rated health	.46*	.82***	.38	.56**
Activity	-1.06	-.70	.54	
(Adjusted R^2)	.43	.27	.14	.15
	$F(4,52)11.52^{***}$	$F(4,94)9.34^{***}$	$F(4,56)3.42^{**}$	$F(2,118)11.85^{***}$

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